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AUTHOR Williams, Constance M.
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ABSTRACT

A review of research on reading and language development highlights the process of immersion, a concept posited by psycholinguistic theorists. Reading aloud, especially at an early age, significantly affects students as it bridges the gap between written and spoken language and familiarizes children with language patterns of literature, expands vocabulary, adds to the child's knowledge of the world, is a means to develop schema, and motivates the child to read and enjoy books. Researchers have found a positive correlation between being read to and reading achievement, reading readiness, the development of listening skills, and early reading capability. Reading to children allows for the introduction to new words, complex sentence structures, standard forms of English, various styles of written language, the development of a sense of story, motivation to refine reading skills, and a pleasurable experience. Furthermore, read-aloud programs may increase reading achievement in children of lower socioeconomic status and younger children in general. Reading aloud to children gives them an educational head start. (JK)

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WHAT RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT THE EFFECT OF ORAL READING ON READING ACHIEVEMENT

Constance M. Williams

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Reading is a complex and not fully understood form of communication which requires active participation by the child (Harkness, 1981 and Gerth, 1983). It is sometimes defined as the " meaningful interpretation of written or printed verbal symbols" (Harris and Sipay, 1975). To limit experience to decoding of symbols, development of auditory memory or visual perception or any other subskill is to do the child a disservice.

Recent theories of reading place focus on language context rather than on mastery of subskills. Harkness (1981) cites conclusions by Goodman "acquisition of literacy is an extension of natural language learning for all children. Instruction consistent with this process will facilitate learning" (Goodman and Goodman, 1979).

Research in language development shows children do not learn language by imitation. According to theories of psycholinguistics a child is immersed in language from the

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beginninng. He learns the "whole" and from there is able to differentiate, abstract rules and therefore create his own expression. Brown and Bellugi's (1964) work with children and mothers show children's development of language is not pure imitation but relies on differentiation, and prior knowledge (Harkness, 1981).

Reading is an extension of oral communication (Sipay and Harris, 1975) yet written language is very different from oral language.(Stewart,1985) Children are affected by and learn to approximate the language (oral) of those around them. Parents, teachers, and television influence a child's language- literature enriches it.(Cullinan, 1977).

Hooper and Hare researched the impact of reading aloud on experiential backgrounds and language appropriate behavior of average first grade students. The treatment group was read to from circus related books, twice a week for eight weeks. The control group continued with regular school programs. Evaluation was based on evaluation of drawings, mean length of response, and diversity of language. Students in the read- aloud program showed significant increase in knowledge of circuses over control group. They also displayed more maturity in language when talking about circus pictures drawn.

Language in books is highly structured, more provocative and complex (Cullinan, (1977). Current research by Durkin in comprehension points to the schema theory that comprehension is dependent upon what's on paper and what's

in the head. Reading aloud not only bridges the gap between written and spoken language, but it familiarizes children with language patterns of literature (Burket, 1981), expands vocabulary, adds to the child's knowledge of the world, and is a means to develop schema (Durkin, 1981). Durkin also points out that students can become more aware of the story components of plot, character and theme through worthwhile read- aloud activities. Experiences with books allow a child to see the relationship between print and speech. (Stewart, 1985) Most importantly they will learn reading is supposed to make sense (Burket, 1981).

Psycholinguists apply language emersion theory to learning to read. Prerequisites for reading based on psycholinguistic assumptions are:

a) child must be able to form rules about structure of language

b) child must be motivated to respond to print

c) child must find reading pleasurable and useful

d) child must develop insight that print is meaningful

e) child must develop linguistically (Harkness,1981)

Consider the words of Dolores Durkin "language is more caught than taught". What better way to expose a child to language than to read to him (~Vail, 1977). When a child becomes familiar with books due to pleasant reading aloud experiences, reading becomes pleasurable. (Harkness, 1981)

Vail writes that Berg (1979) attributes motivation to read and enjoy books to reading aloud from an early age.

Students become enthusiastic readers because they see reading as worthwhile.(1977)

Available literature on the effects of reading aloud call attention to researchers who have found a positive correlation between being read to and reading achievement and readiness. (Porter, 1985)

Burgess describes a study "The Effects of a Training Program for Parents of PreSchool Children on the Children's School Readiness". Parents were given information and techniques which emphasized the importance of reading to children. The experimental group scored significantly higher than the control on the Metropolitan Readiness Test. Reading readiness was not totally attributed to reading aloud, but the researcher considered it was a major factor.(1982)

Frick emphasized the development of listening skills as a result of read-aloud programs. She cites a study by Boodt (1978) in which listening skills positively affected the reading performance of elementary remedial readers.(1986)

Harkness sights research done by Sakamoto (1975) with Japanese students, Clay (1976) Maori, Samoan and White and Clark (1976) with fluent readers. It was found that those children who read when they entered school, despite diverse cultural differences, had a common bond-they were read to by their mothers, from an early age. Cullinan and Harkness make note of Dolores Durkin's work (1966) with early readers. She found early readers in Oakland, California

also had a common characteristic; they were read to by older siblings and parents long before entering school. Findings from a further study by Durkin , "Poor Black Cchildren Who Are Successful Readers" revealed these common characteristics of

a) preschool reading ability

b) parent involvement in reading aloud activities

c) consequential student love of reading. (Harkness, 1981)

Additionally, in "The Read-Aloud Remedy" Fisher and Elleman outline several reasons to read to children:

1) introduces pupils to new words

2) introduces children to more complex sentence structure

3) exposes students to more standard forms of English

4) exposes students to various styles of written language

5) develops a sense of story in children

6) motivates children to refine their reading skills

7) adds pleasure to the day (1984)

A read-aloud program for reluctant readers was conducted at a community center. Pre and post test rating scales were completed by the children's teachers. Results indicated repeated use of the program improved the children's motivation and reading skills. (Howell and Sylvester, 1983)

Lengyel and Baghban report positive results in "The Effects of a Family Reading Program and Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) of Reading Achievement and Attitudes". This study was conducted with first and second graders in a rural coal mining area. Treatment group parents were encouraged to read to their children for fifteen minutes a day seven days a week for nine weeks. Sustained silent reading was also scheduled in the classroom for fifteen minutes every afternoon for all children. Those children who participated in family reading and SSR achieved a higher score on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills than those students who participated in only the SSR program. (1980)

Many researchers feel children from homes of lower socio-economic status may benefit more from being read to than other children. Sandra McCormick cites Lyon's (1972) research in which she suggests that because of the greater contrast of the spoken language and language of literature of lower socio- economic status children, read-aloud programs may be more beneficial in increasing reading achievement.

Younger children may benefit more from read-aloud programs. Porter conducted a study of fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students who were read to by high school students. Reading achievement scores on the California Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills showed an increase within the treatment group as well as interest in reading. The

fourth grader's scores were more greatly affected than those of the fifth and sixth graders.(1969)

The reviewed literature gives strong support for making read-aloud activities an integral part of the reading program. The key factors are exposure, motivation, development, enrichment, and pleasure.

> Reading is an integral part of life in modern society requiring a certain level of proficiency from everyone, and putting those who are unable to read fluently at a great disadvantage. Children deserve the best start possible. Being read to seems a good place to begin. (Harkness, 1981)

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